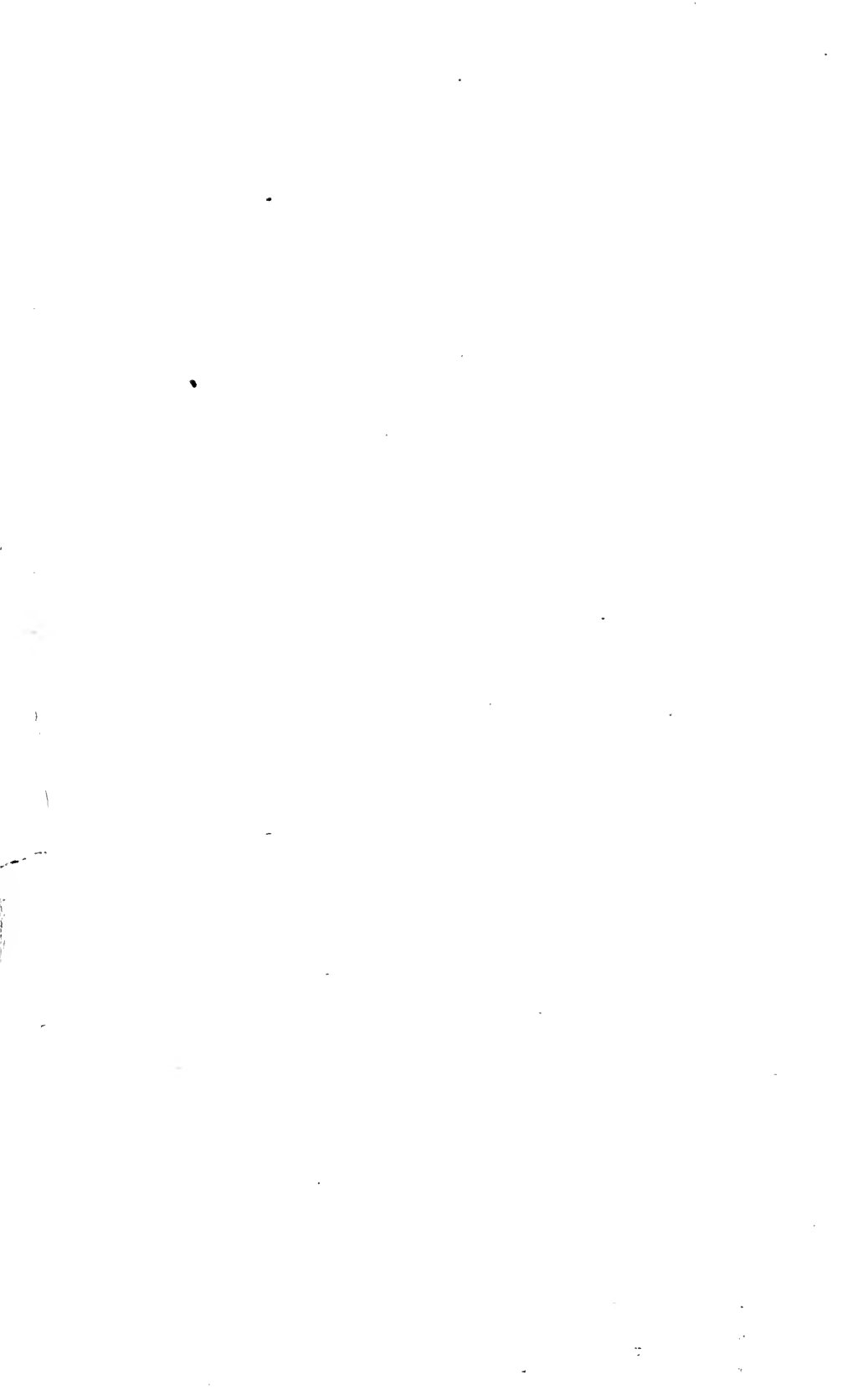


LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

✓

2
2
2



JERUSALEM WHICH IS ABOVE IS FREE.

A Sermon

Preached at St. Margaret's Church, on Sunday Morning,
March 12th, 1899, by the

REV. CANON J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON, D.D.,
Rector.

"But Jerusalem which is above is FREE, which is our Mother

"So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the FREE."

Gal. iv., 26, 31.

ST. PAUL is uttering the protest of the spiritual against bondage to the material. There never has been an age in which this protest has not been needed. Certainly it is needed as much as ever to-day.

In the history of Israel we find the Prophets uttering this protest. Formal religion with burdensome enactments—sacrifices and fasts and multiplied prayers—once the symbols and utterances of a fervent spiritual life, the shapes in which the spiritual had embodied and expressed itself—had been maintained and cherished as valuable in themselves when the vitalising spirit had fled.

Hence the prophetic protest against the lifelessness of mere forms, whose observance was found easily compatible with unrighteousness and had come to be a cloak of hypocrisy. The great men of the state, and the great ladies of society, were causing the miscarriage of justice, and were grinding the faces of the poor and living in costly luxuriousness, while all the time they were bringing their expensive sacrifices and making their wealthy offerings and were loud in their professions of religion.

Hence the protest of Isaiah : "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me? saith the Lord . . . Bring no more vain oblations : incense is an abomination unto me ; the new moons and the Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with : it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting."

Hence the protest of the Psalmist : "Thou desirest no sacrifice, else would I give it Thee ; but Thou delightest not in burnt-offerings. The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit ; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, shalt Thou not despise."

Not that those sacrifices were not of divine institution and acceptable to God when the hands that offered them were pure : for the same Psalm expressly declares that when heart and hands are purified the old worship will at once revive in its full meaning : "Then shalt Thou be pleased with the sacrifice of righteousness, with the burnt-offerings and oblations : then shall they offer young bullocks upon Thine altar."

The protest of the spiritual against bondage to the material was reiterated in the teaching of Christ. We have only to recall such sayings as "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath," or the words which He spake "making all meats clean," or again the notable declaration to the woman of Samaria, "Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father : . . . God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth."

Not indeed that he sought to cancel for the Jews of His own day the Mosaic ritual. On the contrary He shewed His recognition of it again and again : going up to keep the Feasts, sending the cleansed leper to offer the sacrifice which Moses had commanded, and, generally, in His own words, "fulfilling all righteousness." "These things," He said, "ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

In the words which I have chosen from the Epistle for to-day we have, as I have said, the same protest uttered by St. Paul. His letter to the Galatian Churches is a loud cry for Liberty, when certain Jewish Christians were seeking to impose on Gentile converts the traditions which to themselves were rightly and of necessity sacred, but which were not intended to be of universal obligation, and had no binding force upon those who

had entered the service of Christ by another door than that of Judaism.

It was St. Paul's mission to proclaim that the Gentiles became members of Christ's Body by their Baptism, and thereby acquired equal privileges with the circumcised Jew. To accept Circumcision, therefore, was on the part of a Gentile to surrender this great liberty, and to subjugate himself to the entire yoke of the Mosaic Law. It was to admit that no one could be a good Christian, unless he were first a good Jew. It was to make St. Paul's wider Gospel of the 'Christ for all men' of none effect.

They had begun well, he says. They had entered the Church without a mention of Jewish observances—simply as Gentiles who believed in Christ as the Saviour of all men. Why were they listening to these Jewish teachers, who would rob them of their liberty in order that they might boast of having added new converts to Judaism or to a Judaised Christianity?

The whole future of Christianity as a world-wide religion was at stake in this controversy. Was Christ indeed 'the Son of Man'—the Man for all men—or was He, after all, only 'the Son of David,' the Messiah of the Jewish people?

It was not unnatural that earnest Jews who had accepted Jesus as their nation's Messiah should proclaim that the only way of God was through Judaism to Christ. But St. Paul, though 'a Hebrew of the Hebrews,' had learned a larger Gospel than this: and it was this larger Gospel which was threatened by these teachers.

Hence the passionate protest of a man who felt that the whole work of his life was at stake: "If an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

In the present passage, after he has pleaded for the life and freedom of the Spirit as against the bondage of ceremonial observance, he uses an illustration from the Old Testament Scriptures, to which his opponents made their appeal. Abraham

had two sons : Ishmael born of the slave-girl Hagar, Isaac born of the freewoman and true wife Sarah. These things have a deeper meaning : they contain an allegory.

In order to interpret the spiritual sense, he combines with this scriptural illustration another from the Rabbinical teachers, who used to distinguish between the earthly and the heavenly Jerusalem. The earthly Jerusalem was but the counterpart of a heavenly City, which exhibited in perfection above what was only imperfectly realised here on earth. St. Paul accepts the distinction, and goes on to identify the earthly Jerusalem with the Jewish Nation, and the heavenly Jerusalem with the new Christian Church. He then boldly declares that the earthly Jerusalem, which was in bondage to the Roman Empire, corresponds to the slave-girl Hagar, the mother of Ishmael ; while the heavenly Jerusalem corresponds to the freewoman Sarah, the mother of Isaac, the child of the Promise.

“This Hagar . . . answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is FREE, which is OUR mother.”

“So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the FREE.”

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us FREE ; and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

The argument from illustration is seldom a strong one ; and St. Paul does not rest his case on a proof like this. He uses it rather to answer objections, and as a kind of *argumentum ad hominem*. It is to enforce the moral, rather than to establish the position, that he argues thus.

You are right, he seems to say, about your ‘heavenly Jerusalem’ as the truth to which the earthly Jerusalem points.

The Jewish Nation is truly the forerunner and the imperfect type of the Christian Church. It is as the mother of Ishmael to the mother of Isaac. Ishmael comes first indeed, but he is the

son of the slave-girl : Isaac comes only afterwards, but he is the son of the freewoman. "Cast out," saith the Scripture, "the bondwoman and her son : for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren," (he triumphantly concludes,) "we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the FREE."

Beware lest you forget this : lest you get enticed back into bondage — bondage to Judaism with its elaborate ceremonial enactments—a yoke which (in St. Peter's words) neither our fathers nor we were able to bear. You have nothing to do with all this. You came to Christ quite independently of it. You are Christ's freemen : you were born free of a free Mother. Do not surrender your heritage. Do not exchange your spiritual freedom for what is after all a bondage to the material.

What lessons do the words of St. Paul offer to us in the Church of England to-day ? Freedom is a watchword of English Christianity. It is a national characteristic, which has been fostered and protected by the English Church. We in England have, in perhaps as high a measure as has ever yet been attained anywhere in the world, a free Church in a free State. This has been the issue of the English Reformation. No foreign Prince or Prelate has any jurisdiction over this Church or Realm. The supremacy rests with a Member of the Church itself, specially consecrated by the Church as Sovereign of the People. Nor is this Freedom in any peril or real prospect of peril. The interference which the Papacy exercises in the affairs of certain foreign Churches and States is as unknown and as little to be anticipated in England as it is in Russia. As sons of the Church of England, "we, brethren, are not children of the bondwoman, but of the FREE."

But we may ask, Is there no danger of the encroachment of formalism upon the English Church—of a return, not indeed to the bondage of the Papacy which our fathers shook off, but to the no less serious tyranny of exaggerated external observances and exaggerated priestly claims ? of an introduction of the whole

system of Rome *minus* the Pope? Of private confession universally enforced as the condition of Communion, of an elaborate ritual made as unintelligible to the bulk of our congregations as if it were in Latin, of a servile and ignorant imitation of distinctively Roman practices, which foster a spirit alien to the freedom and simplicity of Englishmen? Is there not a danger of our becoming entangled in a yoke of bondage?

To this I venture to give you the answer which has come to me, as I have been able to observe the situation from a standpoint comparatively remote from controversies—the standpoint of an academical position. And I answer Yes, in certain quarters: No, not for the whole Church.

And this twofold answer is based on a consideration of that very Freedom which is characteristic of Englishmen alike in Church and in State.

On the one hand, our Clergy and Laity are extraordinarily free to make what I may call religious experiments. Take, for example, a wholly unobjectionable instance—that of Parochial Missions. The very name of Missions in this sense may be said to be borrowed from Rome. In foreign churchyards you have often seen a hugh wooden cross, bearing the one word *Mission* followed by the simple date. There was some outcry when the word was first introduced into the usage of the English Church. The Mission of a Priest from another Parish, and the surrender into his hands for ten days of the whole of the services of the Church, was regarded as liable to abuse and fraught with peril to our parochial system. But the experiment succeeded, and the practice is almost universally approved. It has done more than any one change of the last 40 years to revive the devotional spirit of the Church of England. Something similar may be said of the Retreats for Clergy or Laity, which some prefer to entitle Quiet Days, in order to avoid another borrowed name.

The freedom which permits such far-reaching changes is in turn responsible for the introduction of other practices confessedly

Roman, as well as for the reintroduction of old English customs which have long become obsolete. The law of the Church of England has proved far more elastic than was supposed a little while ago, and the measure of its elasticity has not yet been completely determined. It is certain that it admits of an amount of ritual observance which, if it becomes merely formal, must be a serious foe to the spiritual life. I say nothing now of practices which plainly controvert the Church's law.

This freedom constitutes a danger from which a cast-iron system would be exempt.

On the other hand, this very freedom is our truest safeguard. Exotics will not always grow in the new soil to which they are transplanted. Let us be Englishmen enough to trust the English spirit. Let us not be betrayed into trying to secure freedom by imposing a new bondage. Let us recognize the law of the pendulum: reaction is followed by reaction, and the clock moves steadily and truly on. If you hold the pendulum, you are a fool for your pains.

We have come out of a gruesome state of neglected churches and dismal services and dry discourses and careless priests and sleepy congregations. Thank God! The activity of the clergy (again I speak from an academical position of observation) is unparalleled, the Laity are urging them on—especially, as I was reminded only yesterday, the younger laymen are urging the clergy on to give them more services and better music and more beautiful ritual. Clergy and Laity are combining in hundreds of parishes to introduce religious experiments, some of which are alien to the English spirit—and these will die out—some of which will take root and grow, because they are congenial to the English soil.

But the pendulum has not done its swing yet in very many of the parishes of the land: and the reaction to simplicity has still to be waited for. If freedom be allowed to prevail, we need have no fear for the ultimate issue. We shall not lose our heri-

tage, if we are faithful to the God who has given it us. "We, brethren, are not children of the bondwoman, but of the FREE."

I have been speaking from the standpoint of the Englishman, who loves his Church as she is, and who shudders at the notion that she may forget to preach the Gospel, and bind her children with the bondage of borrowed customs and unspiritual rites and ceremonies.

There is another side. The identity between the component members of the Church and the State is an ideal only in the present day. That the ideal is not a practical reality is again due to our prevailing characteristic of Freedom. We no longer enforce conformity by penalties or disabilities. That is often forgotten when men are complaining that the Church of England does not wholly walk in the ways of the 17th or the 18th century. But this fact means a relaxation on the citizen's side of the compact between Church and State. Is there to be no recognition of this change when the obligations of the Church are in question? For the Church, be it remembered, is no department of the State. Neither is it a figure of speech. It is not a mere addition sum of a number of individuals who combine for certain religious purposes. It is a living whole. It has a life of its own, and a history of its own, and a principle of growth and progress of its own. The Church as such may make terms with the State as such : but she is responsible to herself and to her invisible Lord that those terms shall not be, nor come by changed circumstances to be, terms which shall prevent her from developing her powers to the full to meet the new necessities of altered times.

"The Jerusalem which is above is FREE, which is our Mother." An early 2nd century interpretation added, "the Holy Church which we have confessed." It was a true gloss, and brought out well the meaning of St. Paul. But what would the 2nd century Church have said if any power other than her own had attempted to alter her formularies or her observances?

A relaxation of the civic obligation of the citizen to the Church is a wise product of our spirit of freedom. It has not involved any disturbance of the general relation of the State to the Church. A measure of further independence allowed to the Church in the regulation of her internal affairs is a corresponding relaxation which is much to be desired, and may fairly be claimed: and this again need involve no disturbance of the general relation of the Church to the State. Of the details by which the policy of Church and State in this matter may be best worked out I say nothing. The pulpit is for principles.

Be assured of it that as individual citizens we must maintain that freedom of the Spirit which keeps forms and ceremonies in their proper and subordinate position, as embodiments of and not substitutes for spiritual forces and spiritual results. We must "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us FREE."

As Churchmen we must believe more in the Church: we must grasp far more fully than we have grasped the fact that we are parts of a living whole, members of the Body of the Christ, citizens of the heavenly city, the Jerusalem which is above and is FREE.

